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Alan Dunn – Hard to read

Our motives may be hard to read.

Jeff Young and Martin Heslop's *A552 HEX* is a written and recorded hex put on a road on the Wirral to stop it further destroying the community - <http://tinyurl.com/jstwl8a>. Performed live, Jeff's words are buried deep within a laptop-generated sequence of noises and sung through a megaphone into two distorting microphones. We get the sentiment and make out occasional words: "motorways are literally ballasted with stories ... in every mile of motorway, there are forty-five thousand buried books, holding the tarmac and asphalt in place. The magic spell against a road is embodied within its own dark materialism."

We, the contributing artists and editors, want to employ this journal to bring together a small series of words and a series of small words that lead down other roads. We want the journal to contain no justification for itself. We want it to be an interruption. We want it to sound good.

We begin with an image in our minds of cut-out words fluttering out of a car window. The car is speeding along country roads constructed from years of compressed books, journals, lifestyle magazines, leaflets, fliers and coffee morning pamphlets. We do not know who is driving but Simon is in the passenger seat. He frees the words into grey skies and shrubbery. In the real world, their scale changes and they become tiny and indecipherable. To even attempt to read it, it being the text, we must follow the same instructions, to the letter, over and over again. This is an impossibility, but as the words soar and fall, Simon leans over and points out a car going in the opposite direction. It is Zara and she offers to take us on a hashtag journey through, well, wells – <http://tinyurl.com/ja3wbv5> - beginning on 1st January and ending on 31st January 2017. It is finite Instagram journey meets 2017 resolution. It is Obey The Duchess of Cambridge Football Beach Selfie Pancake Follow Me. Some of us are easily distracted and lack the concentration for fuller texts. It is all shrinking, inside our iPhones, inside Twitter and Instagram, down our own rabbit hole, tinier and tinier and harder and harder to read.

Paul Morley's *Words and Music: A History of Pop in the Shape of a City* (2005) is a fantastic journey through a history of sound and music in a car driven by Kylie Minogue and a series of passengers including Kraftwerk, Alvin Lucier, Missy Elliott, Lou Reed and Stockhausen. Kylie slams her petite foot down and accelerates over tarmac layered upon millennia of albums, novels, cassettes, blogs, satirical magazines, CDs and ancient scrolls. The opening line is "I am sitting in a room" and *Words and Music* cruises from one human sitting in an empty room towards evasive lists and playlists so enormous and teetering that they become superblocks flanking the car's final entry into the virtual city of a writer's ideas. At a talk in Liverpool in 2015, Morley singles out the bane of his life as editors inflicting harsh word count restrictions on him. I invite him to contribute to the *FOUR WORDS* project and he emails: I NEED MORE WORDS.

While editing, I experiment with hand-held FM transmitters and receivers, picking up faint voices and straining ear muscles to turn the sounds into a string of coherent words. We want to add something to reading this journal by removing convenience. We want to add anxiety and neurosis. We want the journal to vanish between the radio frequencies. Philippe Parreno's *The Boy From Mars* (2006) installation at Tate Liverpool - <http://tinyurl.com/hu7hkz2> - includes a free DVD for us to take away. We are warned however that from the moment the sealed disc is opened, it immediately begins to oxidise and self-destruct. His intentions are hard to read, but once it is gone, it is gone.

In 1991 as a student at Glasgow School of Art, Jonathan Monk screenprints a set of black texts on white that simply say *CANCELLED*. He subversively pastes these over every single poster he finds for a gig, talk, seminar, concert, reading, exhibition, protest or record fair.

We see blocks of black covering forms that used to be words: ex-words, former-words, post-words or hangover-words. We see Claire perform live, drunk on Bols Blue – <http://tinyurl.com/zx244mt> - or writ(h)ing on the floor and reading scratched-out words while shrieks of noise fill the room - <http://tinyurl.com/jyfwspn>. Doubled up, she points towards the crowd and singles out Nathan - <http://tinyurl.com/z4qaf24> - who steps into the ring and starts taking the words off us every few seconds. We do want the words in this journal to change every few seconds. *CANCELLED*.

When confronted by Bryony's PDF for the very first time on screen, we struggle to know how to read it. Do we print, zoom, scroll, scan, peer, transcribe, spool, interpret, lean on one side, tilt our heads, get out magnifying glasses, rotate the projector or reject it as a scandalous impossibility? Do we gather a crowd with torches and each comprehend a section before forming a storytelling community? She leans over Simon and Zara and tosses minimum font sizes out the window. Above the roar of the rough road, she tries to shares a little of the evolution of *Regurgitating Futile Nonsensical Meanders Yell Politely Involuntarily Peering Into Depths Of Your Mind* (2015) but ...

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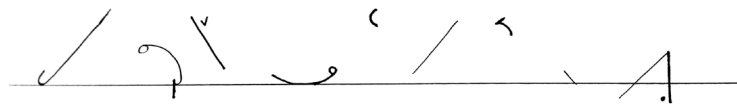
We may be hard of hearing by now. While editing, I dig through my old vinyl. I prefer it h(e)ard to read and hard to make out: My Bloody Valentine, Einstürzende Neubauten, Corpses as Bedmates, Bikini Kill, Scritti Politti, Dead Kennedys, Dinosaur Jnr, Head of David, The Fall and Septic Death. Whether at 33rpm or 45rpm, it is too fast, too loud or too slow to make out the words. Not folk. Not country and western. Not spoken word. The lead singer – and often lyricist – subsumes his or her messages into the shared sound. The

first bands I ever see live, Jesus & Mary Chain and Cocteau Twins, bury their words like cadavers, deep inside dark feedback or *puirt à beul*, aware of the locals gathering round with torches to see what all the noise is.

While editing, I travel by train between Liverpool and Leeds and the announcements are ...

In 1984, Jeff Nuttall makes the same journey and reimagines these electronically muffled train announcements as sublime hiccupping poems for BBC Radio: "It is far more probable that the unique distortion of language achieved by the Manchester Victoria announcers is to be attributed to a revival of creative inventiveness in local speech. *The tray-ann stoogiton fy hoity fortsatiffa-teetha hatfordas leeess* is such a bold development from *The train standing at platform fourteen forms the 6.15 for Bradford and Leeds*."

While editing, I assist an artist with her PhD, typing up hand-written notes that have been done without much thought for the transcriber. I stare at rapidly scratched forms and try to match them with possible words. As a child I am fascinated by my mother's secretarial shorthand writing. It is the Pitman system originated in 1837 that she learns and she reaches around 100 words per minute at her peak. We have lost that art. We both search for a shorthand font to type this section in but of course it is phonetic and not a font as such. Perhaps the whole PhD should be hand-written and shorthanded: "My contribution to knowledge is being hard to read." We are surrounded by things that are hard to read.



We leave too many words out when hand-writing notes, especially during tutorials and presentations. We scan, annotate, Google, flick through, Wiki, paraphrase, cut, sample, summarise, take shortcuts, dumb down, deflect and plagiarise.

We want the journal to be like an early SWANS composition - <http://tinyurl.com/zveevle> - presented on new old 180g scratched vinyl, tortuous, brutal, slow, painfully loud and containing few words. We want the journal to consist only of *FOUR WORDS*. We always want to restrict the number of words to FOUR. We want the journal, like *The Boy from Mars*, to be mortal and only readable in the month of January, a period racked with introspection and resolutions. Both *FOUR WORDS* and Zara's *Wellness* piggyback January and refuse to budge. Each *FOUR WORDS* statement remains on the large Media Wall opposite Lime Street station for only ten-seconds. Some letters travel the length of the 31m wall in 3 seconds. That is 23mph language. Once they are gone, they are gone and the regular programming returns.

This is an interruption.

I log into Facebook and his latest post lacks gaps. There are no paragraphs, too many abstract nouns, very little punctuation and no room to breathe. Did art critic Gilda Williams not tell us that she stops marking an essay when she reads a sentence with four abstract nouns in it? The FOUR wrong WORDS? No, perhaps that is not true. We want the editors, authors, advisors and readers to allow us the freedom to be hard to read. While editing, I read Malcolm Lowry's *Under the volcano* (1947). It sits by my bedside and in my workbag, constantly nagging away. Finish me! I am intentionally hard to read! We struggle through the dense trees to get to the sunny clearing.

We want this journal to make the other journals less hard to read. I increasingly struggle with these words. Concentration is required to make sure that this section does not contradict a previous, nor does it lead us all along the wrong road, one ballasted by centuries of yellowed newspapers, crossed-out lyric sheets, punctured maps, torn shopping lists and faded hairdressers' price lists.

It may be hard to read because you lack the stamina and concentration. Or, we all lack the faith in all the words we left out.

Alan, we want to end with an evasive endnote that leaves us where we begin. Zara?